

**Security Council**

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**Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to
Security Council resolution 2367 (2017)****I. Introduction**

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments relating to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my previous report, which was issued on 17 January 2018 (S/2018/42), and the briefing of my Special Representative for Iraq to the Security Council on 20 February 2018.

II. Summary of key political developments**A. Political situation**

2. During the reporting period, preparations for the upcoming Council of Representatives (the parliament) elections, discussions over the federal budget and the rapprochement between Baghdad and Erbil dominated the political agenda. On 21 January, the Federal Supreme Court issued a decision stating that parliamentary elections must be held 45 days before the conclusion of the preceding electoral term, in conformity with article 56 (2) of the Constitution of Iraq. Following this ruling, on 22 January, the Council of Representatives endorsed a previous decision of the Council of Ministers to hold the parliamentary elections on 12 May. This decision was subsequently ratified by the President, Fuad Masum.

3. During the same session, the Council of Representatives voted on several amendments to the Council of Representatives Election Law (45/2013). These amendments stipulate that the Government should ensure a safe environment for holding the elections, facilitate the return of internally displaced persons to their areas of origin and enable them to vote for their constituency of origin, regardless of their location of displacement. The Ministries of Defence and the Interior should ensure security during the elections. Political parties contesting the elections should not have armed elements under their control. A special voting process would be undertaken for members of the Iraqi security forces.

4. The Council of Representatives also amended eligibility criteria for candidates, introducing the requirement that candidates should hold a bachelor's degree, excepting 20 per cent of candidates of each political entity, who may hold a high



school certificate or equivalent. One additional seat was allocated to the Faily Kurdish component in Wassit Governorate, increasing the total number of parliamentary seats from 328 to 329.

5. In his weekly press conferences on 20 and 27 February, the Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, indicated that the Council of Ministers had agreed on measures to facilitate the return of displaced persons and to ensure that the elections were held in a secure environment and in a transparent manner. On 27 February, the Council of Ministers established a ministerial committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of these measures, comprised of the Minister of Defence, Irfan al-Hayali; the Minister of Higher Education, Faryad Rawandozi; the Minister of Culture, Abdul Razzaq al-Issa; and the Minister of Water Resources, Hassan al-Janabi.

6. On 20 February, Mr. Al-Abadi requested the international community to send election observers in order to promote the integrity of the process. On 28 February, the Independent High Electoral Commission announced that the election campaigning period would start on 10 April and last until the day before the elections.

7. On 27 February, the Council of Ministers determined that the Provincial Council elections would be held on 22 December 2018. The Parliament has approved the decision, which has yet to be ratified by the President. On 3 March, members of parliament from Kirkuk reached a breakthrough agreement on amendments to the Law on Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008, as amended), which was subsequently adopted by the Parliament. Kirkuk will now be able to participate in provincial elections for the first time since 2005. UNAMI offered its good offices and intensive facilitation throughout the drafting of the amendments to the Law.

8. At the same time, the Kirkuk Provincial Council remained inoperative and no formal meetings were convened. Individual Council members, as well as other interlocutors, repeatedly shared with UNAMI their concern that the failure of the Provincial Council to reconvene had a negative effect on both governance and security. Notably, tensions flared over returns of Sunni Arabs to the Dibil and Daquq districts of the Governorate. This also revived land disputes, with a number of plaintiffs seeking to settle them in court.

9. On 3 March, the Council of Representatives adopted the 2018 Federal Budget Law, with 187 out of 328 members of parliament attending. Mr. Al-Abadi subsequently congratulated the Iraqi people on the adoption of the budget law, which will enter into force retroactively from 1 January 2018. All Kurdish parliamentary blocs boycotted the vote, owing mainly to dissatisfaction over the size of the Kurdistan Region budget share and the sovereign (federal) expenditures. In the budget, total revenue is estimated at \$77.5 billion and expenditure at \$88 billion. The planned deficit is about \$7.5 billion lower than last year. Many measures are introduced in the budget to curb operational expenditures and increase non-oil revenues, including sales taxes, and fees for public utilities such as water and electricity. Although the President, citing a number of legal, financial and formal irregularities, returned the budget for revisions to the Council of Representatives, the Speaker, Salim al-Jubouri, maintained on 14 March that the budget had been adopted in line with the Constitution. He explained that those who objected to the provisions of the budget law could file a complaint with the Federal Supreme Court, but had no right under the Constitution to reject the law. On 29 March, the President, Fuad Masum, instructed his office to complete the necessary procedures to publish the budget law in the Official Gazette. Mr. Masum asserted that his decision to endorse the budget law was in the interest of the public, to protect civil rights and the international commitments of Iraq, and to facilitate the work of state institutions across the country.

10. On 5 March, the Council of Representatives adopted the law on the Iraqi National Oil Company Law, which established a fully State-owned company directly linked to the Council of Ministers. The company aims to achieve a better utilization of oil and gas resources and will be active in the areas of exploration, development, production, marketing and related activities. A percentage, not exceeding 90 per cent, of the company's profits will flow into the national budget. The law annuls the Law Establishing the National Oil Company of 1967.

11. On 8 March, Mr. Al-Abadi issued a set of regulations to adjust the status of popular mobilization forces fighters, based on the Popular Mobilization Commission Law of November 2016. The regulations specify military ranks and minimum eligibility criteria, set salaries and allowances on a par with those applicable to Ministry of Defense staff and extend the scope of the Military Penal Law, the Civil Service Law, and a number of other laws to Popular Mobilization Commission employees.

12. A date for the next regional election in the Kurdistan Region has yet to be set, following the formal request of the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, in December 2017. On 28 February, the Kurdistan Regional Parliament adopted a reform bill, focusing on civil servants' salaries and pensions. Prior to the ratification of the bill and following public demonstrations against it, the main parties backing the bill agreed to reopen it for revision, on 4 March. Discussions in the regional Parliament over possible amendments continue but, to date, remain inconclusive.

13. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan continued to discuss the convening of a party congress to elect its new leadership, after the death of its founder, Jalal Talabani, in October 2017. On 17 March, its leadership council convened in Sulaymaniyah to announce an interim party politburo. In preparation for the parliamentary elections of 12 May, the Movement for Change (Gorran), the Kurdistan Islamic Group and the Coalition for Democracy and Justice, led by the former Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Barham Saleh, formed an electoral alliance in the disputed areas. These three parties, as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, are running on separate lists in the Kurdistan Region. The Kurdistan Democratic Party is boycotting the elections in Kirkuk. Shaswar Abdulwahid, a prominent Sulaymaniyah-based businessman who last year organized a "No for now" campaign prior to the referendum of 25 September, founded the New Generation Movement, which intends to field candidates for office countrywide.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

14. Discussions continued between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to address outstanding differences, notably the re-opening of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports to international traffic, as well as the allocation of federal funding for civil servants in the Kurdistan Region. Since January 2018, Mr. Al-Abadi and Mr. Barzani have met in Baghdad, Davos and Munich and maintained regular contacts through different channels to resolve their differences.

15. On 4 February, a joint committee of the federal and regional governments completed an initial audit of the number of civil servants in the Kurdistan Region ministries, with the exception of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. The secondary audit of the payroll of regional departments was completed for the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education; auditing of the remaining ministries continues. At the end of February, Mr. Al-Abadi reiterated his expectation that agreement over civil servant salaries would be reached soon. On 19 March, the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Finance and the Economy

announced that the federal Government had released 317 billion Iraqi dinars for the partial payment of Kurdistan Region civil servants. Subsequently, on 28 March, the Kurdistan Regional Government published a statement detailing amendments made to the civil servant salary saving system, which would not apply to civil servants earning less than 400,000 Iraqi dinars.

16. On 21 February, a spokesperson of the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs reported that agreement had been reached to resume flights between the Kurdistan Region and Saudi Arabia, exclusively for Umrah passengers, and, on 7 and 8 March, such flights operated from Erbil and Sulaymaniyah international airports. On 13 March, Mr. Al-Abadi issued an executive decree allowing the resumption of international flights to Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports, placing them under the authority of the federal Government. On 19 March, international flights to both airports resumed.

17. The federal Government reiterated that it must maintain ultimate control over all exports of natural resources from Iraq, notably oil and gas. Negotiations continued over the use of the Kurdistan Region oil pipeline to export oil from Kirkuk governorate. On 27 February, Mr. Al-Abadi indicated that these negotiations included Turkey.

C. Security

18. Pockets of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) elements continued to carry out asymmetric attacks across the country. On 18 February, alleged ISIL fighters attacked a popular mobilization forces unit in Hawijah district, Kirkuk Governorate, killing a number of popular mobilization forces fighters. The following day, Iraqi federal police and the popular mobilization forces launched a security operation in the district, aiming at clearing the area of ISIL fighters. Mr. Al-Abadi ordered the opening of an investigation into the attack. On 11 March, a number of civilians, including a pregnant woman and two children, were killed at a disguised ISIL checkpoint along the Baghdad-Kirkuk road. A further five of these irregular checkpoints were set up along the road between 19 and 22 March, at which eight civilians and three militia members were killed. Seven other civilians and eight members of the Iraqi security forces who were abducted during the incidents concerned are still missing.

19. On 13 March, the commander of the 57th Brigade of the Iraqi Special Operations Forces was killed at a checkpoint near Samarra, Salah al-Din Governorate. Mr. Al-Abadi subsequently clarified that the commander had been shot by "undisciplined elements", adding that he had ordered an investigation. Local media reported shortly afterwards that six suspects had been arrested.

20. Armed opposition groups continued to be active in the Hamrin Mountains, on the border between Kirkuk and Salah al-Din governorates and in western Anbar Governorate. On 6 March, the Iraqi security forces announced the start of a clearance operation in the desert near the Iraqi-Jordanian border. On 24 March, clearance operations were launched in Diyala Governorate in response to increased activities by armed opposition groups south of the Hamrin Mountains, close to the border with Salah al-Din Governorate.

21. Baghdad continues to experience attacks with improvised explosive devices, including vehicle bombs, targeting the Iraqi security forces and civilians. A total of 52 such attacks occurred between 20 February and 25 March, killing 20 persons, including 17 civilians. To improve the security situation in Basra Governorate, the federal Government launched a law enforcement operation there on 21 February. The operation, expected to run for two months, is aimed at targeting criminals and disarm

tribes in the north of the Governorate. It has reportedly already resulted in the arrest of several individuals and the seizure of illegal weapons.

22. In a parallel development, Iraqi security forces entered Sinjar district in Ninawa Governorate, taking control over the area on 25 March, following reports that fighters from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) had withdrawn from the area. On 26 March, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mr. Al-Abadi, and the Prime Minister of Turkey, Binali Yıldırım, discussed the situation in Sinjar by telephone. Mr. Yıldırım indicated that Turkey would not engage in military action in Sinjar without the approval of the Government of Iraq.

D. Regional and international developments

23. Following the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, generously hosted by Kuwait in Kuwait City, from 12 to 14 February, the Government of Iraq has continued to strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries and other international partners, on the basis of mutual political, economic and security interests.

24. From 16 to 18 February, Mr. Al-Abadi participated in the fifty-fourth Munich Security Conference. In his speech, he called on the world to unite against terrorism, highlighted the triumph of Iraq over ISIL and warned that remnants of ISIL were still active in the region. He vowed that Iraq would continue to enhance its relations with its neighbours on the basis of mutual interests and respect for national sovereignty. Mr. Al-Abadi expressed his appreciation for the support offered in Kuwait, which he interpreted as confidence in the Government of Iraq. In addition, he pledged to clamp down on corruption in a bid to restore investor confidence.

25. In the margins of the conference, the Prime Minister met, *inter alios*, the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel; the Prime Minister of France, Édouard Philippe; the Prime Minister of Turkey, Binali Yıldırım; the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit; the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, with whom he discussed the situation in Iraq and bilateral cooperation on security, trade and development.

26. The Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, also attended the Munich Security Conference and met, *inter alios*, the Federal Minister of Defence of Germany, Ursula von der Leyen, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, Angelino Alfano, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of Kuwait, Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Marie Eriksen Soreide, the Minister for Defence of Sweden, Peter Hultqvist, and the Minister of State for the Middle East of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Alistair Burt. In meetings, the delegation of the Kurdistan Region expressed strong willingness to peacefully resolve tensions with Baghdad and noted that the Constitution should be the basis for resolving all differences between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal Government.

27. On 18 February, the President, Mr. Masum, and the Vice-President, Nour al-Maliki, separately received the senior adviser for international affairs to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Ali Akbar Velayati, with whom they discussed bilateral relations. On 19 February, the Minister of the Interior of Iraq, Qassim al-Araji, visited Amman, where he discussed bilateral trade and the Turaybil border crossing with the Prime Minister of Jordan, Hani al-Mulki. On 20 February, Mr. Masum and Mr. Abadi separately received the

President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, with whom they discussed bilateral economic and trade relations. On 25 and 26 February, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Salim al-Jubouri, visited Doha, where he discussed regional developments and the reconstruction of liberated areas with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, and senior government officials.

28. From 26 to 28 February, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim Abdulkarim Al-Jafari, visited Moscow, where he and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Rogozin, co-chaired the seventh meeting of the Iraqi-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Research and Technological Cooperation. Upon arrival, Mr. Al-Jafari was received by the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, who reaffirmed the support of his Government for the efforts of the Government of Iraq to build national accord and respect for the interests of all ethnic, religious and political groups.

29. On 3 March, the Speaker, Mr. Al-Jubouri, visited Kuwait, where he met Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Speaker of the parliament of Kuwait, Marzouq Al-Ghanim, to discuss bilateral relations. On 5 March, Mr. Al-Abadi held a telephone conversation with King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, during which they discussed bilateral relations and the work of the Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council for promoting bilateral trade and investment. On 5 and 6 March, the Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Shariatmadari, visited Baghdad, where he met, consecutively, the Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction, Electricity and Health. On 6 March, Mr. Masum received the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, to discuss continued assistance to internally displaced persons and the search for missing persons. On 7 March, Mr. Al-Abadi received the First Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Eshaq Jahangiri, to discuss bilateral ties and coordination. On 15 March, the Speaker, Mr. Al-Jubouri, visited Ankara, where he met the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and discussed strengthening bilateral ties, as well as the counter-terrorism operations of Iraq.

30. On 20 February, Mr. Al-Abadi reaffirmed that Iraq continued to seek international support in the fields of military training, logistics and intelligence gathering. On 21 and 22 February, he met Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs of the United States of America, Robert Karem, to discuss collaboration in the fight against terrorism. On 1 March, the Minister of Defence of Iraq, Irfan al-Hayali, received the Chief of the General Staff of Turkey, Hulusi Akar, to discuss counter-terrorism cooperation. On 5 March, Mr. Al-Abadi received the Secretary-General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, with whom he discussed countering violent extremism. On 15 March, Mr. Al-Abadi received a telephone call from the Vice-President of the United States, Mike Pence, during which they discussed the upcoming Council of Representatives elections, as well as Baghdad-Erbil relations.

III. Update on the activities of the Mission and the United Nations country team

A. Political activities

31. In anticipation of the Council of Representatives elections on 12 May, my Special Representative for Iraq and Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance engaged intensively with members of the Independent High Electoral Commission, government officials, members of parliament, representatives of political parties, women's groups, civil society

organizations and religious and community leaders. My Special Representative applauded the steady progress made by the Independent High Electoral Commission in election preparations and commended the commitment of the Commissioners. He underlined the importance of holding elections in an inclusive, participatory, transparent and secure way with broad participation, including women and youth, and confirmed the continued support and assistance of UNAMI for the Independent High Electoral Commission in preparing the elections, with full respect for the sovereignty, Constitution and laws of Iraq. He reiterated the need to ensure that new voting and result management technologies were correctly deployed and fully explained to stakeholders, to enhance confidence in their credibility, and underpinned by an audit of the system and its software by a respectable international company. UNAMI assistance with the electoral process also included facilitating development of a political parties' electoral code of honour, at the initiative of Iraqi political parties.

32. My Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance visited several camps for the displaced in Kirkuk and Baghdad governorates to advocate the inclusion of internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups in the upcoming elections. My Deputy Special Representative highlighted the importance of the participation of displaced persons, encouraging them to exercise their right to choose their parliamentary representatives. She underlined the need for measures to be put in place to ensure that first-time voters and vulnerable groups are enabled to register for and vote in the elections. Following the advocacy by UNAMI, the Independent High Electoral Commission decided on 21 February to allow displaced persons living in camps to vote via conditional absentee balloting.

33. My Deputy Special Representative also engaged with Turkmen, Arab and Kurdish representatives from Kirkuk to resolve outstanding issues in the Governorate, notably mediating discussion which led to agreement to hold Provincial Council elections in Kirkuk simultaneously with those in other governorates.

34. From 21 to 24 January, my Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Miroslav Jenča, visited Iraq, which included a visit to Mosul. During his visit, he met with the senior leadership of the Government of Iraq, Members of the Council of Representatives and representatives of civil society, as well as the diplomatic community. He reiterated the continued and dedicated support of the United Nations for the promotion of a united and inclusive Iraq, national reconciliation, transitional justice and accountability, as well as strengthened regional cooperation and partnership.

35. While commending the Government of Iraq for its tremendous efforts to eliminate ISIL, my Special Representative urged the Government to continue its coordination with international partners and the United Nations in the fight against terrorism. During his visit on 6 and 7 March, the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov, underlined the importance of comprehensive counter-terrorism efforts in line with the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant Security Council resolutions.

36. My Special Representative continued his engagement with key stakeholders in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region. He welcomed the readiness for discussion, which had led to positive developments in relations between the two sides, including the re-opening of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports to international flights on 19 March and payment of civil servant salaries. He urged leaders to continue their dialogue in a spirit of genuine partnership to resolve outstanding issues, underlining the importance of stability and the harmonious coexistence of all Iraqi components.

37. My Special Representative also continued to pursue his efforts with the Iraqi leadership and regional countries in support of national reconciliation, calling for

continued momentum and a genuine national political reconciliation dialogue that would pave the way for smooth government formation after the elections. He also called on Iraq to address the impact of ISIL on the Iraqi people, including combating extremist ideologies and promoting moderation and tolerance.

38. My Special Representative welcomed the announcement made by the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Ahmet Üzümeü, of the completion of destruction of the country's chemical weapons remnants. He characterized the destruction of chemical weapons remnants as a notable achievement, which would help Iraq fulfil its obligations under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.

B. Electoral assistance

39. The Independent High Electoral Commission continued its preparations for the Council of Representatives elections of 12 May. On 20 February, the Commission ran a ballot lottery to determine the number and order by which the 88 political entities contesting the elections would appear on the ballot paper. The Commission has also submitted the list of nearly 7,000 candidates for vetting to the Supreme National Commission for Accountability and Justice, the Directorate of Criminal Records and the Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Education. Once this vetting process is completed, the Independent High Electoral Commission will finalize the list of candidates and proceed with printing of the ballot papers. Preparations for out-of-country voting are ongoing in 19 countries in which significant numbers of eligible Iraqi voters reside. The Commission has reported that, as at 18 March, 6,181,418 million voter cards had been distributed, that is, 44.33 per cent of the total.

40. UNAMI continued to provide targeted technical assistance and advisory support on various aspects of electoral preparations. Technical advisories were shared with the Commission on measures to facilitate the voting of internally displaced persons. UNAMI also engaged with the Commission on the technologies being deployed for the elections. From 27 February to 1 March, the Commission organized a technical integration meeting that included the signing of an agreement between the Commission and its two technology providers on the interoperability of the technological devices for voter verification and election results management. UNAMI attended the meetings in an advisory capacity. UNAMI has continued to encourage the Commission to undertake a simulation process, now scheduled for 14 April, to test the performance of the devices and software systems to be used for the elections. It is a significant undertaking, involving 56,000 locations in Iraq.

41. From 3 to 12 March, a United Nations electoral needs assessment mission was deployed to Iraq to determine progress in the preparations for the elections, following up on an initial visit in November 2017. The delegation met with various interlocutors, including Independent High Electoral Commission officials, members of parliament, representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, the media and United Nations entities, as well as international partners engaged in the Council of Representatives elections.

42. In the absence of a firm date for the Kurdistan Region parliamentary, presidential and Provincial Council elections, its Independent High Electoral Commission focused efforts on evaluating the voter registry. On 25 February, its representatives met the Board of Commissioners in Baghdad to discuss arrangements on the sharing of the voter registry.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

43. Armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continued to take a heavy toll on civilians. From 20 February to 31 March 2018, 16 civilians were killed and 139 wounded, primarily by explosions in Baghdad. By comparison, from 20 December 2017 to 18 February 2018, 69 civilians were killed and 327 wounded. The leading cause of civilian casualties remains the use of improvised explosive devices. For example, on 20 February, in western Mosul, an improvised explosive device detonated inside the house of a family which had just returned home from displacement, killing two.

44. The remnants of ISIL continued to focus attacks on members of the Iraqi police, Iraqi security forces and the popular mobilization forces in Ninawa and Kirkuk governorates. For example, on 24 February, ISIL fighters killed two police officers and wounded another at their checkpoint in the Khabbaz oil field, Yaychi subdistrict, south-west of the city of Kirkuk. Civilians also continued to be targeted by unknown gunmen in Mosul district: on 21 February, in eastern Mosul, gunmen stopped the car of the local mukhtar and shot him dead. The perpetrators are suspected of being affiliated with ISIL.

45. As at 29 March, the Department of Yazidi Affairs in the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs in the Kurdistan Regional Government reported that 3,154 Yazidis (1,471 women and 1,683 men) remained in ISIL captivity.

46. Iraqi courts continued to issue death sentences for terrorism-related crimes. To date in 2018, the Supreme Judicial Council has publicly announced the imposition of 22 death sentences for terrorism-related crimes, including against 1 German woman, 1 Syrian man, 1 man of unknown nationality and 16 Turkish women. The Government of Iraq has not responded to a request by UNAMI for information on terrorism-related indictments, convictions and death penalty sentences and on where and when executions have been carried out.

47. The bodies of civilians continued to be recovered from the rubble in Mosul. As at 28 March, the civilian defence corps has recovered a total of 1,842 bodies of civilians, of which 3 were found in eastern Mosul. From 25 to 27 March, the civilian defence corps recovered the bodies of 47 civilians, including 11 women and 7 children, from underneath the rubble in western Mosul.

48. UNAMI continued to advocate accountability in the context of human rights violations and abuses committed during the ongoing armed conflict, in particular for international crimes that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and, possibly, genocide. Following an Iraqi-led process supported by the Mission, a proposed draft law on the creation of a specialized court for international crimes was delivered by the Mission to Iraqi institutions, parliamentarians and civil society actors, for their consideration.

49. Mass graves continued to be discovered in areas previously under ISIL control. For example, on 21 February, in Qayyarah subdistrict, Mosul district, Ninawa governorate, local police discovered a mass grave containing the bodies of 76 persons who may have been victims of ISIL.

50. The Mission also continued to advocate the appropriate protection of mass graves, with the aim of collecting, securing and preserving evidence. In preparation for the arrival of an independent investigative team, currently being established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017) to support the efforts of Iraq to hold ISIL accountable for its crimes committed in Iraq, UNAMI has compiled a compendium of mass graves in Iraq (to date) and shared it with Iraqi authorities, including the Mass Graves Department in the Martyrs Foundation, and other key

stakeholders such as the Independent High Commission for Human Rights. Since June 2014, the Mission has recorded the discovery of 117 mass graves resulting from the conflict with ISIL. The estimated number of victims buried in these graves, as reported to UNAMI, is between 6,006 and 12,505.

51. On 5 March, my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, concluded an eight-day visit to Iraq, during which she heard first-hand accounts of survivors of sexual violence perpetrated by ISIL. During discussion with Iraqi officials on questions of justice and accountability, she stressed the importance of ensuring that alleged perpetrators are held accountable not only for the crime of terrorism but for the full extent of the crimes of sexual violence perpetrated on Iraqi women and children, including abduction, rape, sexual slavery and forced marriages. She noted that her Office stands ready, together with the soon-to-be-established investigative team, as requested in Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), to work directly with Iraqi judges, investigators and prosecutors. The Special Representative, together with the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, inaugurated the Baghdad premises of the first shelter outside the Kurdistan Region for women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The shelter is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund.

52. On 7 and 8 March, the Government of Iraq organized a two-day conference to mark International Women's Day, at which it circulated a draft report on the implementation of the Iraqi National Action Plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The conference was organized by the Higher National Committee for the Advancement of Iraqi Women and the Directorate for Empowering Iraqi Women, both under the Council of Ministers, in conjunction with the national team on Security Council resolution 1325 under the auspices of Mr. Al-Abadi. The aim of the conference was to solicit views from local communities, civil society organizations and internally displaced women in order to further develop the draft implementation report before its planned submission to the Security Council later this year.

53. The Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, co-chaired by UNAMI and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), received reports of 13 incidents of violations against children, affecting 22 children. Of those incidents, 10 were verified, affecting 19 children (all boys). In Ninawa Governorate, five boys were verified to have been recruited and used by armed actors, while in Ninawa, Kirkuk and Salah-al-Din governorates four boys were killed and 10 others injured by various types of explosive material. In Ninawa Governorate, a school was used for military purposes.

54. On 7 March, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, accompanied by representatives of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs met a United Nations delegation from the Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Department of Political Affairs, UNICEF and UNAMI. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, who also chairs the newly established high-level inter-ministerial committee on monitoring and reporting, confirmed the Government's willingness to address both alleged and verified grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, through establishing and enhancing protective and preventive measures. The delegation also met the National Security Adviser, Mahmoud al-Bayati, in his capacity as designated focal point for the country task force on monitoring and reporting, to discuss next steps for the development of an action plan to address the recruitment and use of children by the popular mobilization forces, which were listed as a non-State armed group in the 2016 annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/72/361-S/2017/821).

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

55. The humanitarian crisis in Iraq has entered a new phase, with thousands of displaced persons returning to their areas of origin. Retaken areas are being cleared of explosive hazards and rubble, and major efforts are under way to restore electricity, water and sewage networks, re-establish the Government's social protection mechanisms, including the public distribution system, jump-start local economies and open schools and health centres.

56. On 6 March, the Government of Iraq, the United Nations and humanitarian partners jointly launched their humanitarian plans for 2018, based on an estimation that 8.7 million people across Iraq will require some form of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian partners are committed to providing assistance to highly vulnerable Iraqis in the hardest-hit areas and ensuring that they receive the protection that they require and to which they are entitled under international humanitarian law. Humanitarian partners will target 3.4 million vulnerable people with assistance in 2018, for which \$569 million is required. This is a significant reduction from 2017, when 6.2 million people were targeted, reflecting the evolving nature of need of the crisis-affected population and the growing capacity and reach of national institutions, as well as the expanding role of development actors.

57. By the end of February, there were 2.3 million remaining displaced, while 3.5 million returned to their homes and communities. Many displacement camps are being consolidated and decommissioned, and governorate returns committees comprised of Government, non-governmental organizations and United Nations representatives — are in the process of being established to ensure that returns are voluntary, safe and dignified. Despite all the efforts in place, there are still reports of forced and premature returns in Baghdad, Anbar and Salah al-Din governorates and of obstructed returns and re-displacement of people back to camps in Anbar Governorate. There are limited alternatives for those displaced families unable to return owing to individual circumstances, vulnerabilities or security concerns. Humanitarian partners continue to advocate with authorities to prevent forced and premature returns and to pursue viable alternatives for displaced families unable to return.

58. The registration of humanitarian international non-governmental organizations remains a slow and cumbersome process. Negotiations are ongoing to streamline the procedures, and obstacles are being identified and raised with the authorities. In the meantime, the Government has facilitated the approval of more than 1,000 fast-track visas for international humanitarian staff without valid entry documentation. Efforts continue to enable the provision of humanitarian assistance to those people in need with the fewest bureaucratic impediments possible.

59. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Facility for Stabilization continued to safeguard against the resurgence of violence and extremism, facilitate returns and lay the groundwork for reconstruction and recovery. This was achieved through repairing public infrastructure, providing grants to small businesses and women-headed households, boosting the capacity of local government and providing short-term employment through public works schemes in areas directly impacted by ISIL. Over 2,000 projects are either completed, under way or being designed in the 31 liberated towns and districts within which UNDP has been asked to work. This includes the key areas of Anbar, Ninawa, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk governorates.

60. In Anbar governorate, repairs to the Japanese Bridge were completed in March, connecting over 30,000 commuters and commercial traffic to western Anbar. In Ninawa Governorate, electricity was restored to the new water treatment plant in west

Mosul, providing clean drinking water for nearly 500,000 people. In the Ninawa Plains, work was done to restore health services, notably the completion of the first phase of the rehabilitation of Hamdaniyah Hospital in February. Prior to the conflict, roughly 1,000 patients visited the hospital daily for outpatient services, reaching approximately 500,000 people.

61. In support of the major efforts being made by the Government of Iraq to stabilize newly liberated areas through the Funding Facility for Stabilization, my Deputy Special Representative for Humanitarian Affairs worked closely with the Iraqi security forces, government and parliamentary representatives, civil society and stabilization teams to identify areas critical to consolidate military gains and where violent extremism is likely to emerge. During the reporting period, UNDP and the Government of Iraq agreed that the priority for the Funding Facility in 2018 will be to support the rigorous interventions of the Government in five key strategic areas: Mosul, western Ninawa, the Baiji-Hadar corridor, the broader Hawijah district and western Anbar.

62. On 14 March, Mr. Al-Abadi, with assistance from UNDP, at his request, convened a conference of leaders from all minority communities in the Ninawa Plains. In preparation for the conference, the National Reconciliation Commission held a series of meetings and round tables with each group in order to better understand their demands. Prime Minister Abadi gave the keynote speech and the Government announced initiatives that it will pursue in the area.

63. The clearance of explosive hazards in the old city of Mosul continued. UNMAS located over 800 explosive hazards at one site alone during the reporting period, and over 27,000 have been removed from western Mosul since mid-2017, reducing the threat for returning civilians. In the al-Maidan neighbourhood in western Mosul, UNMAS cleared 491 explosive hazards. Over 100 suicide belts were removed from decaying corpses in February, and UNMAS anticipates that more will be found in the rubble.

64. UNMAS has established a presence in Kirkuk in anticipation of survey and clearance operations in Hawijah and surrounding areas and has been shown a stockpile of over 12,000 explosive items collected by the local authorities. These could pose a threat to nearby civilians if the local authorities are not provided with support to destroy the items. Following efforts by the Government of Iraq, the international community and UNMAS, two non-governmental mine action organizations received registration from the federal Government and will become operational once their accreditation is completed.

65. Following the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, meetings were held between the World Bank Group and the United Nations to continue formalization of the Iraq Reconstruction and Development Financing Facility. The Iraq Recovery and Development directors' level contact group, which includes the World Bank Group, the United Nations and key donors, met on 15 and 29 March to discuss progress on establishing the core oversight, coordination and funding mechanisms for the Iraq Reconstruction and Development Framework.

66. On 11 and 18 March, the United Nations country team met to review progress and next steps for the recovery and resilience programme and discussed the proposed funding mechanism. On 14 March, an informal meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum was briefed by the World Bank Group and the United Nations on progress with establishing the Iraq Reconstruction and Development Financing Facility, on the United Nations Recovery and Resilience Fund, and on the formalization of the Government's Executive Committee structure.

67. A workshop on mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in national and subnational development plans was held in Baghdad on 4 and 5 March. A team of UNDP Sustainable Development Goals experts facilitated the workshop, with more than 100 participants from ministries, governorates, civil society organizations and United Nations agencies. Two key outcomes were: agreement on levels of support from the United Nations to promote integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into the national medium-term development plan; and the identification of challenges and opportunities for strengthening alignment of the national Development Plan 2018–2022 with the Sustainable Development Goals.

68. A regional workshop on common country assessments and preparation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks was held in Amman from 20 to 23 March. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together United Nations staff from Iraq, Syria and Yemen to explore developing the common country assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks in complex environments. Participants from Iraq included senior programme staff from UNDP, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Integrated Coordination Office for Development and Humanitarian Affairs. This team will begin preparing for system-wide engagement on the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

E. Security and operational issues

69. The United Nations in Iraq continued to implement robust security risk mitigation measures which allowed it to deliver programmes and activities in a complex and changing security environment. Despite significant security challenges, the United Nations and its partners remain actively engaged in political, electoral, humanitarian and development activities countrywide, on the basis of programme criticality and in close coordination with the Government of Iraq. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security supports UNAMI and 18 United Nations agencies in Iraq. The United Nations agencies recently increased their field presence in order to meet growing operational requirements. Currently, there are 794 international and 1,600 national staff members operating from seven United Nations offices across the country.

70. Following the Independent External Assessment of UNAMI, I established an interdepartmental and inter-agency group, led by the Department of Political Affairs, to develop an implementation plan for the assessment recommendations, in close collaboration with UNAMI and the United Nations country team. UNAMI has since taken steps towards implementation. In its revised 2018 budget, UNAMI included measures responding to recommendations falling within its immediate purview, for example, to augment the presence of UNAMI outside Baghdad. Additional recommendations will be addressed in the context of the 2019 budget proposal, pending consideration by the mandate of the Security Council in July 2018.

71. The implementation of recommendations related to coordination, performance reporting and management of premises is on track. For example, a Department of Safety and Security team has reviewed the security architecture on the basis of current threat levels and examined facility perimeter protection and access control measures in Baghdad, Erbil and Kirkuk.

72. There has been severe pressure on staff accommodation. A number of accommodation units in Baghdad were seriously damaged by earthquakes in January 2018, and some staff had to be relocated to temporary accommodation. Repairs to damaged buildings, funded from a trust fund provided by the Government of Iraq in 2009, are currently under way.

IV. Observations

73. I welcome the adoption of the legal framework governing the organization of the Council of Representatives elections and the continued commitment of the Council of Ministers to ensuring a safe and secure environment for holding elections. It is of crucial importance that all efforts be made to enable the conduct of the elections in a credible and inclusive environment in which all Iraqis, men and women, from all governorates, are given the opportunity to participate, free from fear and intimidation.

74. I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to provide advice, support and assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Government of Iraq with regard to election preparations, as mandated by the Security Council. Only a few weeks remain before Iraqis go to the polls to choose their next democratically elected representatives. I welcome the efforts by the Commission to adopt the necessary measures to promote participation of those eligible voters who may remain displaced at the time of the elections. At the same time, I urge the Commission to undertake all necessary steps to safeguard the integrity of the polling, vote counting and transmission of election results, in the light of the new technologies being deployed. For the electoral results to be acceptable, the process must remain transparent. I also encourage a more intensified outreach campaign to familiarize voters and the wider public with these new election features and how they will affect voting. In addition, I welcome the efforts by the Government and its security institutions to put in place the necessary arrangements to enable the safe and orderly conduct of the elections.

75. I call upon all candidates and political party leaders to engage in a free and fair electoral competition which is based on mutual respect and promotes the national interest and stability of Iraq. To that end, I commend the efforts of political parties across the political spectrum to develop an electoral code of honour, as testimony to their commitment to the transparency and integrity of the electoral process. UNAMI remains committed to supporting those efforts, at the request of the political parties of Iraq.

76. I am encouraged by the progress in relations between Baghdad and Erbil, with the opening of regional airports to international flights and the provision of salaries for Kurdistan region employees. I call upon the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to build on these positive steps and to act expeditiously to address all outstanding issues between them, in line with the Constitution. There is no sustainable alternative to genuine dialogue, and UNAMI remains ready to facilitate discussion if requested by both parties.

77. I note the request of the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan region to set a date for the next cycle of regional elections. I remind all parties in the region of the importance of holding regular and credible elections, which provide elected institutions with their legitimacy.

78. I am also pleased by the agreement reached by Members of Parliament, which allows for the holding on 22 December 2018 of the first Provincial Council elections in Kirkuk since 2005. At the same time, I am concerned by the negative effect on governance and security caused by the failure to reconvene the current Provincial Council and to elect a new Governor. I urge all parties to take these steps without further delay.

79. I welcome the continuous efforts of the Government of Iraq to strengthen its ties with neighbouring countries and other international partners on the basis of mutual political, economic and security interests. I commend the strong support pledged by the international community to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq, and I call

upon the international community to continue its support for the efforts of Iraq to combat terrorism, diversify its economy and counter corruption.

80. I encourage the Government of Iraq to pass a law establishing a jurisdiction to deal with serious international crimes in Iraq — crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide — for the benefit of the people of Iraq. A proposed draft law on the subject which emerged from an Iraqi-led process involving Iraqi legal experts, academics, judges, prosecutors, members of parliament and representatives of civil society has been presented by UNAMI to the Presidency of the Council of Representatives for its consideration. Adoption of such a law would represent a significant achievement for the country by providing the legal mechanism for international crimes to be addressed in Iraq, in accordance with international standards.

81. I would like to praise the Government of Iraq for the detailed planning and the goals that they have set, building on their historic victory against ISIL, as detailed in the country's Reconstruction and Development Framework, the poverty reduction strategy and the national Development Plan. I urge the international community to continue their strong support and engagement, evident at the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, to assist Iraq in responding to some of the underlying issues that contributed to the rise of ISIL. In addition to continued support for explosive hazard mitigation, reconstruction and economic stimulus, further issues will need to be addressed in order to protect military gains, attenuate the threat of insurgency and achieve more durable stability and security for the people of Iraq.

82. I accordingly urge Member States to continue their strong support for the UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization. To consolidate military gains and protect communities against the resurgence of violence and extremism, the Funding Facility is supporting stabilization activities in five key strategic areas. Some cities in the five strategic areas were liberated only in late 2017 and the Funding Facility is critically underfunded in areas where the risk of the re-emergence of violence is highest.

83. I also urge Member States to consider the importance of the recovery and resilience programme in fast-tracking the social dimensions of reconstruction in Iraq. Three components of the recovery and resilience programme will be implemented in high-priority communities where violent extremism may re-emerge unless steps are taken to restore community trust, build confidence in the Government and open up economic opportunities. In tandem with our humanitarian and stabilization efforts, the recovery and resilience programme is critical to Iraq, and Member States are requested to consider supporting it accordingly.

84. Approximately 8.7 million people will require humanitarian support in 2018, while the humanitarian partners will provide assistance to 3.4 million people. Continued support by the international community for the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan is essential. I strongly urge the Government to redouble its efforts to create the necessary conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons. In order for the United Nations and its partners to address the critical needs of the most vulnerable, it is important that donors provide timely support to the Humanitarian Response Plan. Regrettably, as at 25 March, only \$52 million of the required \$569 million have been funded.

85. Finally, I would like to thank my outgoing Deputy Special Representative for Humanitarian Affairs, Lise Grande, for her truly outstanding work over the last three years in Iraq. I would also like to express sincere appreciation to my Special Representative, Jan Kubiš, and the staff of the United Nations in Iraq for their courageous, sustained efforts in implementing the United Nations mandate in Iraq under very challenging circumstances.